



ISLAM AND SOCIETY

By JOHANNES B. KRAUS

The philosophers and revolutionaries of the eighteenth century who extolled the final dawning of an era of reason would not believe their eyes if they were to visit the earth again and discover how this century of ours is dominated by emotions and other irrational factors. Among the most significant phenomena of this kind they would notice the revival of Islam and the centripetal tendency of the Moslem peoples.

There are at present some 250 million Moslems living in the areas indicated on our map, and their number is constantly growing as a result of conversions and rapid natural increase. In Africa especially, propaganda for the banner of the Prophet is making noticeable progress, and half of Africa's population of approximately 140 millions already belongs to Islam. By the end of another generation we must reckon with more than 300 million Mohammedans. And Islam is not only strong because of the host of its adherents: it is also important because of the natural wealth of the territories it embraces—the oil wells of Iraq and Iran, the cotton of Egypt and western Turkestan, and the numerous raw materials of Indonesia, to give but a few examples.

Within the last few decades a growing nationalism has made itself felt in many Mohammedan areas. Its forces are combining with the old religious forces and with Mohammed's idea that Islam is not only a religion but at the same time a political and social communion that can fulfill its meaning only through world domination. It is for this reason that we are now publishing an article on Islam in our series on religious questions. And since Islam, more than any of the other great religions, possesses a social function, this article deals mainly with the sociological aspects of Islam.

The author is Professor of Social Sciences at the Jochi University in Tokyo, and is both founder and editor of the "Monumenta Nipponica."—K.M.

ALL Mohammedans, no matter to what sect they belong, accept the Koran, the Bible of Islam, as the revelation of Allah, the one God. The basic teachings of the religion of Mohammed contained in the Koran and the fundamental devotional exercises form the foundation for the unity and uniformity of the Moslem world. But Moslem opinions differ even regarding the acceptance of the Sunna (literally the "habits" of the Prophet, his companions, and their immediate successors), a collection of traditions which was placed beside the Koran as a necessary and equivalent supplement. The Sunnites or orthodox Arabs and Turks fully acknowledge the Sunna, while the Shiites trace it back to Ali, the son-in-law of Mohammed, and interpret it differently in many details. And of course there were schisms and differences of opinion regarding the various other traditions and Koran exegeses.

If in the following pages Islam is dealt with as a uniform structure, this is done for reasons of simplification. Actually "Islam" is today the collective name for a large number of sects bitterly contending with each other, but which nevertheless show enough common traits to be considered and treated as a uniform religious structure with its own character. Furthermore, there is a common rhythm of life which pulses through the entire Mohammedan world and which, in spite of all individual nationalist endeavors and in spite of all sectarian contrasts, creates a feeling of religious and philosophical communion which can at any time be activated for political purposes.

"THERE IS NO GOD BUT ALLAH"

The basic religious doctrine of the Koran, in which all Moslems agree, is the belief in the absolute oneness of God as the almighty and all-benevolent Lord

Who has predestined everything and brings everything to pass. Nevertheless, Man is free in his desires and actions. The Koran does not define the relationship between divine predestination and human freedom, and innumerable theological speculations have tried to explain this relationship.

The classic formula: "There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is His prophet," is the indispensable minimum of the Islamic confession of faith. Around this central theological idea are grouped, like concentric spheres, the Islamic standards of law, the conceptions of political, social, and family life. Only with this monotheistic center in mind can the political, social, and cultural creations and phenomena of the Islamic world be grasped and explained. On it is founded the great compactness of the Moslem world of ideas, but also its inflexible one-sidedness.

History has not yet been able entirely to explain how Mohammed, in the midst of a polytheistic environment, arrived at his strict, pure monotheism. At any rate, the founder of the youngest of the three great monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) was under the influence of the two older forms of faith.

OLDER INFLUENCES

There were flourishing colonies of Judaism in many places in Arabia, and for a long time Mohammed nourished the hope of winning over the numerous Jews living in Yathrip (known later as Medina) and of strengthening the cause of his God through their adherence. He even granted them ritual concessions, such as the direction of prayer toward Jerusalem. Only when they continued to reject him did his partiality for them turn to deadly hate, and he did not rest until he had cleared Arabia of all Jews.



Although there were several translations into Arabic of the Christian Gospels in pre-Islamic times, Mohammed never saw one. This is obvious from the mistakes and confusion in the retelling of Biblical stories, the reproduction of Biblical names, etc., in the Koran. (For instance, it confuses Mary, the mother of Christ, with Moses' sister, regards Mary as one of the three divine persons of the Christian doctrine of Trinity, etc.) But the fact that Mohammed was strongly influenced by the Christian world of conceptions is revealed by his main idea, the driving force of his mission as a prophet, namely, his belief in the imminent end of the world and approaching Day of Judgment, whose coming, he was firmly convinced, had been revealed to him by Allah through the angel Gabriel.

Mohammed's monotheistic idea is closely connected with his idea of the imminent Day of Judgment. The "Lord of the Day of Judgment" (Koran I, 3), who holds judgment over mankind, cannot, of course, be

some local Arab deity but must be the *one*, great, almighty God with Whom no other god may be associated. The greatest sin against Him is "association," i.e., idolatry, polytheism. This belief in one God was to prove a suitable means for fulfilling a twofold task: the uniting of the constantly warring Arab desert tribes and the concentration of their martial energies in order to harness them for a new purpose, the founding of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Allah.

THE WORD OF ALLAH

From the very beginning, Mohammed appeared as a "warner," as a preacher of penitence, who called the attention of his fellow citizens of Mecca to the coming Day of Judgment. This was a mission which appealed to the conscience of the individual, which summoned him to purify

his soul, but which did not necessarily contain the tendency towards forming a community. The fact, however, that Mohammed from the first assembled a community of believers around himself points to the influence of another idea which is also reminiscent of Judaism and Christianity: the idea of the Holy Book. The notion he had in this connection was more or less as follows: in God's possession there is a heavenly book in which God has entered the entire plan and order of the world, including the history of the world and the destiny of each human being; a universal book of laws and a universal chronicle in one, so to speak. From time to time God reveals small parts of this book to various prophets whom He sends out to the different peoples. Thus Moses brought the Tora from God to the Jews, and Jesus the Gospel to the Christians; thus God had now called him, Mohammed, to bring a Holy Book to the Arabs, the Koran.

God speaks through Mohammed to the community. These pronouncements of God must be collected and used for religious purposes. The idea of the community which Mohammed had in mind was influenced by the ancient Arab tribal constitution. The only new thing about it was that the communion of *faith*, instead of the communion of *blood*, formed the uniting bond. In place of the old tribal associations, Mohammed set up the association of believers, of the "Moslems," whose title was the union formed with God through His prophet. It was the ancient Semitic idea of union which continued to exist here. Closely coupled with this was the idea of election and predestination which to this day permeates and dominates the Mohammedan world and gives the Moslems their feeling of superiority over unbelievers, over the "infidels."

Through the influence of the ancient Arab tribal constitution, Mohammed's Kingdom of God was from the first given a different appearance from that of the Christian Kingdom of God. While the latter constituted itself independently of the State as a spiritual and supernatural

community of all believers, as the "Church," Mohammed's efforts were directed from the first towards founding a theocratic state. The conception of a purely spiritual community of the "Church," independent of the State, has in principle always been foreign to Islam.

THE CHARTER OF MEDINA

Much has been written and theorized about Mohammed's development from the religious "warner" and preacher of penitence of Mecca to the founder of the united Arab state of Medina. Indeed, it is not easy to find a psychological explanation for Mohammed's transformation from an enthusiastic preacher and prophet to a diplomat, a cunning politician, and a skillful statesman. The change took place with the hegira, Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Yathrib (Medina) in 622 A.D., the first year of the Moslem era. In Mecca, a strong opposition had formed among the aristocratic citizens and merchants against the fanatical preacher Mohammed, whose community, recruited from among the lower classes, was regarded as a threat to the existing constitution of the city and the privileged position of the ruling class. In order to avoid further obstacles and persecution, Mohammed decided to transplant his community to more favorable soil and moved from unfriendly Mecca to Medina. Here he was immediately welcomed as the bringer of order among several rival parties, and he was able with the aid of his followers to reorganize the shattered community.

In Medina, Mohammed united the two local Arab tribes, to whom he gave the title of "helpers" (*ansar*), with his loyal companions in flight (*muhaghirun*), and gave this alliance a communal constitution drawn up with masterly skill. This constitution forms the real foundation for the development by which Islam has become as much a political as a religious structure. From this new community, the entire Islamic State developed which, in the ten years before Mohammed's death, spread over all of Arabia.

We still possess the text of this constitution. Apparently, few changes

were made in the old tribal and family manners and customs. The old tribal constitution continued to exist, with the former tribal heads retaining part of their authority. Common liability on the part of the whole family towards the debts and delinquencies of individual members of the family remained in force. However, among others, the new regulation that the tribe was in duty bound to deliver up for punishment those members who had done grave injury to the members of another tribe was an incisive measure, of the greatest importance for the unification of the desert tribes which were so deeply involved in feuds and vendettas.

In reality, the "Charter of Medina" represents an absolutely revolutionary alteration in the former social order and structure. Two basic innovations were to shape future society.

SUPREME AUTHORITY

First of all, "Islam," that is to say, surrender to the will of Allah, obedience and submission to Allah, was made the highest command. "Islam" was to precede all other obligations of loyalty. The final and highest authority was to rest, not with the tribal chieftains nor with the tribal community as a whole, but with Allah. Allah's tool and interpreter, however, was the Prophet.

In this way an idea was introduced which had hitherto been foreign to the Arab tribes. The proud, independent tribes of the desert were to acknowledge a sovereignty, a higher ruler, a supreme authority. Those individual members of a tribe who joined the Islamic community had to renounce a good deal of their former freedom (for instance, the free election of the leader of their tribe or clan) and bow to the divine authority of Allah. Thus a new theocratic communion arose in which Allah Himself held the political power. His prophet Mohammed derived all power and authority from Allah, Who had assigned to him his mission as prophet. The new "divine community" (*umma*) was Church and State in one and bore characteristics of both. Religion, social life, and poli-

tics merged into one, and Allah formed the center.

FAITH REPLACES BLOOD TIES

The second revolutionary innovation was the sharp distinction between "believers" and "infidels." The former bonds of blood, the allegiance to the tribe, had to withdraw into the background in the face of the communion of religious faith. Even the ties of close relationship had to give way to the new communal principle of faith in Allah and His Prophet. Believers were to help and support one another in material things and form a common front against enemies and perpetrators of injury, even if these latter were of the same blood. Their wars were common to all, and no believer was allowed to accept peace proposals independently of the other believers if it was a war in the service and cause of God; for terms had to be the same for all. The principle of the "holy war," which was later to play so important a part in the propagation of Islam, was already laid down here. Since politics and religion had become identical, the wars of expansion and the campaigns against the infidels were proclaimed "holy wars" and served to found and spread Allah's Kingdom.

The communal constitution of Medina is all the more important for the understanding of Islamic society since the Koran says practically nothing about the social order and political organization of the Moslems. That place which most nearly approaches a fundamental utterance concerning social life (Koran IV, 62) contains little more than the general admonition to the believers to obey "God and His Prophet and those who have authority over you." The commentators, however, do not agree whether by "those who have authority over you" are meant the Moslem leaders in Mohammed's days and their successors, the caliphs, or only the military leaders of a certain campaign.

THE HOLY CITY

With great foresight, Mohammed recognized the possibility of uniting the

desert tribes and, proceeding from their racially conditioned ethical level, of harnessing them for his dominating idea of founding a Kingdom of God. He cleverly included the Kaaba in Mecca, the most sacred object of the Arabs, in his religious system. In this way he succeeded in making Mecca, which was already the commercial and religious center of the heathen Arab tribes, the religious and political center of Islam. According to the Prophet's interpretation, the Kaaba had been built by Abraham for Ismail, the founder of the Arab race. It was towards this building that Mohammed had his believers turn in prayer. With the conquest of Mecca, the Islamic community obtained a geographical and spiritual center whose influence in furthering the communion as well as the unity of the Arabs can scarcely be overestimated. That which the citizens of Mecca could never have dreamed of in their egoistic, shortsighted policy was achieved by Mohammed within ten years through endowing the Arab state which he founded with a buoyant religious idea and linking this idea with the geographical center of Arabia—Mecca.

This geographical link was made even closer through the prescribing of the *hadj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca. It is the duty of every adult Mohammedan to make a pilgrimage to Mecca once in his lifetime, if he is able to do so. The Koran gives minute instructions regarding the carrying out of this pilgrimage and contains detailed regulations concerning the ritual that must be observed, a ritual which has undoubtedly absorbed a large part of the customs of the heathen Arabs of pre-Islamic times.

PILGRIMAGE AND PROPAGANDA

Mecca became the spiritual home of Islam. Every Moslem turns towards Mecca, in the direction of the Kaaba, in his daily periods of prayer. Every true believer longs to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. During the last years before the Great War, some hundred thousand Moslems a year went to the holy city. (This figure has since declined considerably.) There were many evils to be

found in connection with the annual pilgrimages, and the following bitter criticism from Moslem lips may in many cases be justified: "The rich go for pleasure, the middle classes to do business, the readers of the Koran for hypocrisy and in order to be heard and seen, the poor to beg, and thieves to steal."

Nevertheless, these pilgrimages to Mecca are a factor of the first importance in furthering the unity of Islam (also in the political sense). Here Moslems from all parts of the world meet, here they experience the communion of Islamic faith and destiny, here every year the sense of a common Islamic struggle against the outside world of infidels is increased and carried back by the returning pilgrims into the most remote corners of the earth. Here the slogans of the pan-Islamic movement are issued and given to the pilgrims to take home with them: at the time of Abdul Hamid's government, the idea of the Turkish caliphate; later, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Mahdi idea, which has particular influence in India and which teaches that the Last Day is approaching, that Mohammed's return is imminent, and that his last appearance will bring about the end of the world through the union of all peoples under the banner of the Prophet. The present-day slogans pertain to the concentration and massing of the entire Islamic complex of nations with the final aim of establishing the great, all-embracing, pan-Islamic Kingdom of God, at first through uniting all Islamic peoples, and later through subjecting the world of the infidels.

We need not deal here with the question, whether Mohammed, by turning from preacher of penitence to political organizer, became disloyal to his original mission of proclaiming "Islam," i.e., personal surrender of Man to God. But even in those places where "Islam" has become a politico-religious system, it still aims at furthering the surrender to the will of Allah. The true Moslem always feels himself to be the servant of God and sees Allah as the central point of his life. But this relationship to Allah is not a

purely personal affair. From the very beginning, Mohammed formed the religious life of his believers in such a way as to follow a certain rhythm, and he set up a certain way of life which was to be common to all believers. He always had in mind the community and the Kingdom of God. It was his desire that Islam should be essentially a communal religion, which after all corresponded to the Oriental environment in which Mohammed founded the new religion.

THE FIVE PILLARS OF ISLAM

God and the hereafter form the center of Islam. All devotional exercises and prescribed deeds are aimed at furthering "Islam," surrender to the will of Allah, and at preparing the believers for the coming Day of Judgment. But all these prescribed exercises are of a communal nature. Mohammed's moral code is intimately connected with the idea of the "law." Nowhere is there any clear distinction between rules for behavior and such regulations and standards which are otherwise regarded as law or juridical code. Moral standards and legal standards merge into one. The most widely accepted orthodox interpretation of Islam, that of the theologian Abu'l-Hasan al-Ash'ari, distinguishes between the fundamental duty of spiritual faith in the oneness of God, expressed in the formula: "There is no God but Allah, and Mohammed is His Prophet," and the "branches," that is, the shoots of that spiritual faith, the five duties, called *arakan*, the five pillars of Islam.

According to the Koran, these five pillars are formed by the most important of the devotional exercises:

(1) The confession of faith in the formula mentioned above.

(2) The ritual prayer (*salat*), which consists of a series of formulas spoken in various positions of the body five times a day. The hour of prayer is announced by the muezzin from the minaret (*manarah*, lighthouse). The ritual purity necessary must, if contaminated, be restored by washing or rubbing with sand (a

desert custom). The noon prayer on Fridays takes place in the form of a communal service with two short sermons; at least forty believers must be present at such a service.

(3) The giving of alms, a voluntary contribution for the poor and for the requirements of the community, which was later transformed into a head tax.

(4) Fasting, consisting of renouncing food, drink (tobacco), and sexual intercourse between sunrise and sunset of every day in the month of Ramadan (the ninth month of the Moslem moon year).

(5) The *hadj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, from which exemption can be granted in cases where it cannot be carried out.

In addition to these personal duties there is the collective duty of all to take part in the "holy war" (*jihad*) against the infidels whenever it is proclaimed.

THE RHYTHM OF LIFE

With the exception of the communal service at noon on Fridays, all these devotional exercises, which are based on either the Koran itself or the Sunna, are of a personal nature. However, these and other customs observed for religious reasons, as, for instance, abstaining from pork, religious ablutions, wearing a certain costume (the turban and the long gown with sleeves), the changes in daily life connected with the fasting in the month of Ramadan, abstaining from alcoholic beverages, the veiling of women, and many other Moslem customs, all create an environment, a rhythm of life, an atmosphere of communion, which set the believers of Islam apart from outsiders and unite them closely together. In countries with a comparatively low level of civilization, it is these very outward habits and customs which exert a strong proselytizing power on the surroundings. It has been said that every Mohammedan is also a true propagandist. However, if one regards propaganda as advertising in the real sense, this is not true. The Moslem proselytes for his religion by other means, namely, the matter-of-fact, fearless, and regular per-

forming of his religious exercises. When the hour for prayer has come, he kneels down on his prayer mat wherever he may happen to be. He knows no fear of people.

Wherever several Moslem families live in the same place, a community is formed, and that which had hitherto been celebrated in private now becomes part of public life. In Moslem countries, religion is a decisive factor in public life and has given the latter its character. As proof of this one need only look at the beautiful mosques and minarets which dominate a town or district. The simplicity in preaching Mohammed's doctrine has, of course also contributed towards spreading it primarily in countries with a poorly developed educational system. As soon as a candidate for acceptance into the Moslem faith knows the simple confession of faith, has learned by heart the first sura of the Koran, and observes the rules of fasting, the religious ablutions, and the hours of prayer, he can be accepted as a full member. As a rule, circumcision is an indispensable condition; however, exemption is granted even from this with growing frequency. Admission into the faith is usually celebrated by a sort of baptism, a ritual washing which is carried out before the whole community.

ALL BELIEVERS ARE EQUAL

All these customs promote the feeling and consciousness of belonging to the great Islamic community of faith. But in addition to the common faith and the common devotional exercises there is the force of three ideas which permeate the entire social life of Islam and which not only outwardly further this Moslem community but also provide it with a spiritual bond. They are:

- (1) The idea of the brotherhood of all believers.
- (2) The idea of election (being "chosen") and of predestination.
- (3) The idea of submission to the will of Allah.

Islam knows no caste system and no differences of race. From the first, Mo-

ammed awakened the opposition of the civic aristocracy of Mecca by his emphasis on the equality of all men before Allah. In general, Islam is very serious in its doctrine of the brotherhood of all believers. As a result, one can find no pronounced class distinctions in Mohammedan countries, although Mohammed's doctrine could never quite suppress the distinctions of aristocracy, the aristocracy of birth as well as money. According to the Koran (XLIX, 13), all believers are equal in the sight of Allah. He who desires honor should seek it in piety. The equality of new converts (*mawali*) of non-Arabian origin with the old hereditary believers is not only a theory: every effort is made to put it into practice. Every negro who is converted to Islam is welcome in Arabian and Indian families, eats at the same table with fellow believers of other races, and enjoys hospitality everywhere. In spite of the traditional idea that the negro is a human being of a lower order—for centuries the Arabian Mohammedans were the much-feared slave-hunters of Africa—a negro is accorded social respect as soon as he is converted to Islam. By this means he is raised in his social level and feels protected by his new community of faith. This is also an important reason for the spread of Islam in India, where the members of low castes can ensure themselves of social respect and equality by becoming Moslems.

CHOSEN BY ALLAH

The idea of election and predestination gives the believer of Islam a feeling of security; he feels and believes himself to be a favorite of Allah to whom the heavens stand open. This feeling of election is an important factor in the spiritual cohesion of the Islamic family of peoples and gives it a compactness which shuts it off from foreign influences. The USSR, which has made great efforts and gone to great expense to enter into good relations with Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Afghanistan, saw its material aid accepted while at the same time Communism and the Communists were declared enemies of the State. For the

Moslem there is only one single political and religious possibility: the Kingdom of Mohammed as the Kingdom of Allah for all peoples.

The attainment of this universal kingdom is the ideal and the desire of every true Moslem, and today he sees this attainment moving within reach. In the decline of the former political empire of Turkey and in the removal of the politically orientated caliphate, he sees the return of a revived religious movement. Outward reversals only serve to strengthen his conviction that Allah is clearing His Kingdom of dross and preparing it for new conquests.

Actually, the developments after the destruction of the Turkish Empire led to the formation of Moslem national states. However, this Moslem nationalism differs essentially from European nationalism in that it contains, besides the politico-national component (which penetrated the Orient from the Occident), an Oriental religious component.

GROWING SOLIDARITY

The new, pan-Islamic movement, which originates from the belief in election, has also a political root; but it must not be regarded primarily as an actual political movement in the sense of the forming of a politically united Moslem empire. Instead, it is rather a spiritual unity of Islam that is striven for and a strengthening of the feeling of solidarity that will have an effect on the entire political, economic, and cultural life too. There is already a lively exchange of teachers, doctors, and engineers between the various Mohammedan countries; and medical congresses in Cairo, technical congresses in Ankara, and several All-Islamic congresses, are a visible expression of the growing cultural and spiritual union. Radio and press of the Moslem countries are co-operating to an increasing degree, and even economics show a growing inner-Islamic tendency. Regional trade agreements between Mohammedan countries, as well as a network of subsidiary banks which are being established from Egypt in her neigh-

boring countries, proclaim the growing economic links.

However, a dark side of this conviction in the mission and election of the Islam community is to be found in the limitless pride with which the Moslems look down upon all members of other faiths, especially in countries of comparatively low cultural level. It is also revealed in the reactionary segregation from all foreign cultural influences. The centuries-old torpor and stagnation of Islam society is to be traced to this feeling of superiority as well as to fatalism, about which we shall speak presently. If the low social position of women has become worse rather than better during the long centuries; if progress in all spheres of life has only been able to penetrate very slowly into the Moslem countries; if these Moslem countries could only be opened up to communications after the political collapse of the caliphate—then the reason for all this is to be found in the overweening haughtiness of the Moslems. Even the present pan-Islamic movement still contains a good deal of this antiprogressive self-complacency.

"KISMET"

Complete submission to the will of Allah, which is the very essence of "Islam," is the third idea which has given the social life of the Moslem world its peculiar stamp. Allah's will is contained in the Koran, which in its original form, that is, in the original Arabian text, presents the original divine revelation, the authentic Word of God. In accordance with this, it is not the Prophet but the Holy Book which occupies the central position of the religious system. Mohammed himself is only the servant of the Word. The use of Arabic in the original text of the Koran has given Islam its predominating Arabian character.

Since Allah's will is immutable and has been fixed once and for all as the supreme law, the Moslem moral code took on a rigid, narrowly conservative character. The fact that Islam, after the first impetus of conquests and cam-

paigns, bound as it was to this system of regulations concerning the smallest details of daily life, remained passive for centuries, is based on this very restriction of the individual. The crippling of freedom caused by the one-sided emphasis on the principle of submission to the will of Allah had in the long run a deadening effect on all vital dynamism. The word "kismet" (literally: portion, lot) expresses the typical philosophical and spiritual attitude of the old-style orthodox Moslem. Since he knows himself to be harnessed to the inevitable process predestined by Allah, he bows to Allah's will with resignation.

MOSQUE, PARLIAMENT, AND BANKS

For a long time it appeared as if only the absolute, or even despotic form of government, especially in its blending of absolute temporal power with the spiritual office of the caliphs, corresponded to the nature of Islam. But today one often hears the opinion that this form of government was rather the product of historical developments. Mohammed himself did not hesitate to turn to the members of his community for advice in difficult situations, and the Koran speaks in one place of the believers "who consult with each other in their affairs." At any rate, the new combination of powers symbolized in the close proximity of parliament and house of worship in Cairo (where a mosque has been combined with the domed parliament building as an architectural entity) points to the possibility of new ways.

Moslem economics were for centuries limited by the religious prohibition to take interest. The place in the Koran which says that Allah permits selling but strictly prohibits "*riba*" (from the Arabic verb *raba*: to grow, to increase, to practice usury) was interpreted to mean that not only usury but any kind of taking of interest is not permitted. The four great law schools of the Sunnite Mohammedans, which are all represented in Cairo (an indication of the pan-Islamic character of the famous thousand-year-old Al Azhar University there), have

adopted different attitudes towards this question. But in the end three of them found various legal titles and bypaths to justify the taking of interest and to admit it as a general practice in the Moslem world. In modern times, Egypt has become a leader among the Moslem states in the field of banking. The idea that the running of modern banks by Moslems was irreconcilable with the Koran's ban on taking interest was refuted by the founding of the first Egyptian bank with Moslem capital and personnel in 1920.

"THRASH THEM WELL"

As regards the much-discussed position of women in Islam, future research will have to differentiate between that which is determined by the Koran and the original traditions, i.e., that which corresponds to the nature of Islam, and that which has grown up through foreign influences (especially Osmanli customs) and historical developments. The practice of veiling appears to have been common even before Mohammed's times; but Mohammed strictly enjoined his wives and daughters to cover themselves with long veils when they appeared in public.

There are several places in the Koran where women are dealt with as having equal rights and equal value with men in the sight of Allah. Besides these, however, there are also places in which women are regarded as not much more than naughty children. "Men are superior to women inasmuch as God Himself has preferred men to women . . . Warn those whose disobedience you fear and put them into the sleeping chamber and thrash them well. But if they obey, raise not your hand against them." (Koran IV, 38.) Later interpreters of this text have emphasized the inability of women to fulfill public tasks. Almost all later interpretations of texts from the Koran by exegetes, especially of Persian and Turkish origin, have greatly lowered the estimation of women. Most standard collections of the "Traditions" contain a *hadith* (tradition) that "most of the

inhabitants of Hell are women and that because of their unbelief." The Prophet has left Paradise open to women, but many interpreters of the Koran maintain that only four women have ever got there while innumerable men achieve religious perfection.

VANISHING HAREMS

According to the Koran (IV, 2), a man can be married to two, three, or four women at the same time. If, however, his purse should suffer too much he may keep female slaves, whose maintenance is less costly than that of free women. Divorce is left largely to the discretion of the husband, who must, however, support each of his divorced wives.

The popular descriptions and notions of the so-called harem system are greatly exaggerated. The custom of polygamy is by no means as common as it may seem according to travel reports and books about Islam. Besides, the harem system and the segregation of women, that is to say, the limitation of their activities to the family circle, has had the good effect that such conditions as public prostitution and licensed quarters are hardly known in the Moslem world. Public morals in Moslem countries are on

a high level, and it would be unjust to close one's eyes to this.

The new Islamic movement has wrought many changes. The example of progressive Turkey, with the seriously undertaken emancipation of women there, is showing the way for other Moslem countries. Monogamy has become more and more the rule. Moreover, the family, and not the individual, forms the center of Moslem society.

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Contact with the modern Occident has created a state of tension in Islam. On the one hand there is a reactionary tendency which wishes to cling to the old and which expects religion alone to fulfill earthly hopes, above all the Islamic domination of the world as the embodiment of the universal Kingdom of Allah. And on the other there is a progressive trend which affirms and emphasizes political, cultural, and humanistic aims as well as the adaptation of religion to the needs of a new era. The new pan-Islamic current is striving for an adjustment between both trends by trying to combine a spiritual, religious renewal on an Islamic basis with progressive methods in the field of culture and politics. Its impetus is founded in the fact that it is dominated and welded together by strong, religious motives.



Every one acts according to his manner;
but your Lord knows best
who is best guided in the path.

The Koran, XVII, 84